

Washington, DC -- Today, Congressman Joe Sestak (PA-07), along with Budget Committee Chairman John Spratt (SC), Education and Labor Committee Chairman George Miller (CA), Congressman Xavier Becerra (CA), Congresswoman Lois Capps (CA), and Congressman Ron Klein (FL), held a press conference today supporting the Democratic Congressional Budget Resolution's strong focus on programs supporting children and families.

Congressman Joe Sestak released the following statement about his vote for a fiscally accountable and responsible budget which also refocuses on the right investment priorities for America's families.

"This budget restores fiscal responsibility and accountability, strengthens our national defense, while investing in the next generation's health and education as well as America's prosperity," stated Joe. "I made a promise to make the long-term accountability and prosperity of our economy, including a return to fiscal balance, a top priority, while changing our investment priorities to health and education security."

"That's why I voted to return to the 'pay-as-you-go' government under President Clinton, who left us with an over \$5 trillion projected surplus, which has transformed into a nearly \$9 trillion debt under President Bush. Just as an average family from my district has to balance their checkbooks, Congress has a fiscal and moral obligation to practice its own budget discipline and reverse the record budget deficits that have placed trillions in debt on future generations."

"In order to institute fiscal discipline, this budget also includes provisions to invest in efforts to identify and eliminate wasteful spending and improve government efficiency," pointed out Joe. "For example, it contains provisions calling for rooting out waste, fraud and abuse in federal contracting – such as occurred in Halliburton contracts in Iraq and in Katrina-related contracts."

"As important, this budget also puts children and families first by changing our investment priorities to health and education," said Joe. "For example, in Pennsylvania, 281,080 children do not have health insurance. This budget helps these children by creating a reserve fund of up to \$50 billion for the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) – reducing the number of uninsured children across the county. This budget also provides substantially more funding for Pennsylvania's 1,785,000 children enrolled in public elementary, middle and high schools – providing nearly \$8 billion more for education and training than the President's budget."

“In addition, this budget grows our economy, funding the House Democratic innovation agenda – such as putting us on the path to double funding for the National Science Foundation,” pointed out Joe. “And it recognizes that the 983,800 small businesses in Pennsylvania are the engine of the economy. To spur economic growth and support small businesses, the budget rejects the President’s proposal to cut the Small Business Administration by 26 percent from last year’s request.”

“This budget also supports middle-class tax cuts and protects middle-income families from a tax increase by setting up a reserve fund for a long-term fix for the alternative minimum tax (AMT),” said Joe. “In 2004, 114,000 Pennsylvania families were subject to the AMT – and if nothing is done to fix the system, an estimated 837,000 families will be subject to the AMT in 2007.”

“Finally, this budget strengthens our national defense and honors our promises to our brave troops and veterans,” Joe said. “The budget provides the largest increase for veterans’ health care in the history of our country – providing \$3.5 billion more than the President’s budget. This will help to ensure that the 1,145,918 veterans in Pennsylvania receive care worthy of their sacrifice.”

“After years of rising deficits and national debt, this budget finally puts us on the right course,” added Joe. “By instituting pay-as-you-go budgeting, launching initiatives to root out wasteful spending, and making key investments in America’s top priorities of health and education, with a strong defense, this budget is a major step in the right direction for all of America’s families.”

In Congress, Congressman Sestak has made education, healthcare, economic development, and national security his main priorities, and he selected his committee assignments to reflect those priorities. As a member of the Education and Labor Committee, he has advocated for a high quality education for all students. He also recently held two education summits to provide an opportunity for education stakeholders in the 7th Congressional district to discuss key educational issues with policy makers and education experts. The first summit consisted of panel discussions on Early Childhood, Elementary and Secondary Education, and Special Education, led by the Honorable George Miller, Chairman of the House Education and Labor Committee, and the Honorable Terrell Halaska, Assistant Secretary of Education. The second summit explored the challenges facing our Higher Education system and Advanced Training programs and included Congressman Rubén Hinojosa, the Chairman of the US House Subcommittee on Higher Education, Lifelong Learning and Competitiveness as a guest panelist.

As a member of the Health, Employment, Labor and Pensions Subcommittee and as Vice Chair of the Small Business Committee, Joe has also been working on efforts to make healthcare more affordable and more accessible for all. Recently, he successfully passed two amendments improving mental health care for our soldiers. And he held a forum last month on Mental Health and Substance Abuse Equity in Delaware County with Representative Patrick Kennedy, where Representative Kennedy spoke of this and the importance of properly addressing the needs of veterans and service members. He also cosponsored legislation that expands federal funding for stem cell research and a bill which would allow the federal government to negotiate for better Medicare prescription drug prices.

The Democratic budget passed the House by a vote of 216 to 210 this afternoon.

*Born and raised in Delaware County, former 3-star Admiral Joe Sestak served in the Navy for 31 years and now serves as the Representative from the 7th District of Pennsylvania. He led a series of operational commands at sea, including Commander of an aircraft carrier battle group of 30 U.S. and allied ships with over 15,000 sailors and 100 aircraft that conducted operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 9/11, Joe was the first Director of "DeepBlue," the Navy's anti-terrorism unit that established strategic and operations policies for the "Global War on Terrorism." He served as President Clinton's Director for Defense Policy at the National Security Council in the White House, and holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy and Government from Harvard University. According to the office of the House Historian, Joe is the highest-ranking former military officer ever elected to the U.S. House of Representatives.*

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